



TOWN of NEEDHAM
MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Economic Development

781-455-7550 x213

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISORS

WEDNESDAY, October 1, 2014 7:30 AM

Charles River Room PSAB

Present: Matt Talcoff, Chair; Glen Cammarano; Marty Jacobs; Michael Wilcox; Rick Putprush; Tom Jacob; and Devra Bailin, staff

Not Present: Elizabeth Grimes; Peter Atallah; Bill Day; Bob Hentschel; Moe Handel; Janet O'Connor; Bruce Herman; Brian Nadler; Matt Borrelli; and Lee Newman

I. Approval of Minutes

The members approved the minutes for the meeting of September 10, 2014.

II. Reminder of Next Meeting and Hearing Dates

Our next meeting will be on November 5th. All meetings will be in the Charles River Room at PSAB.

III. Update on Mixed Use-128 Residential Overlay

Devra again provided the members with her draft of the Overlay and preliminary fiscal analysis. Devra explained the basic provisions and discussed the need to closely review the highlighted provisions. It was also discussed that, although we cannot dictate rental or condo via zoning, there are concerns about the impact of home ownership on the 10% affordable goal. The members agreed to more closely review the drafts and get back to Devra with comments. Devra noted that she had Marty's comments, which included extending the overlay to Highland Avenue. There was discussion about whether that extension should be conditioned on requiring the first floor within Highland Commercial-128 to comply with zoning uses in that zone. The consensus of those present was that we should impose less regulation and allow developers to make those decisions. It was also noted that the average of home ownership is about seven years, which is not a lot different from condo ownership. It was also noted that there can be difficulties if housing is above retail and especially restaurants. Everyone agreed that the drafts should be **should be forwarded by the Planning Department to Phil Herr ASAP**, who was the expert retained by the Department to do this work.

IV. Update on Industrial District Subcommittee

Devra reported briefly on the meeting with Needham Heights Association on September 15th. There were not a lot of comments about height or density; most of the discussion was about traffic impacts and glare into neighborhoods. Devra committed the CEA into holding another public meeting to discuss our recommendations for zoning AFTER we have traffic analysis and elevation details BUT BEFORE the articles are proposed for hearing by the Planning Board. Devra reported that we now have the elevations of the areas via GIS from Ben Anderson. Devra will then ask Mark Gluesing if he could provide some sort of visual demonstrating the elevations of buildings on existing topography. We are still waiting for the **Planning Department to arrange for a traffic study to be done based on the proposed zoning.**

V. Update on N2 Innovation Corridor (including letter of support)

Devra explained that the Newton Needham Chamber of Commerce has raised about \$30,000 towards the \$50,000 goal to obtain an EDA Local Technical Assistance grant from the federal government. The Town and the City are supposed to obtain about \$12,000 between them (\$5000 from Needham and \$7000 from Newton unless the City is able to get the State to commit a portion of the total). The members reviewed the draft letter Devra prepared and suggested a few changes which were made before the letter goes out.

VI. Discussion of Request from BOS on Recommendations to Improve Business Relationships

Members noted again that that is what the CEA has been and will continue to do. It was unclear what the BOS sought—a list of everything we’ve done or are working on? One member suggested and the rest agreed that we need to know whether the BOS had any particular issues or problems in mind in asking for such recommendations. Devra emailed Kate but has not heard back.

In the interim, Rick Putprush reached out to various small independent business owners for their input. He advised as follows:

“I interviewed several businesses who had recently gone through the process regarding zoning for their use, signage, etc., to get a first-hand opinion of their experiences, and, spoke to several other established businesses about what the Town could do to help improve the local retail environment.

Three “areas of aggravation” were common among the business owners I interviewed:

- The ZBA process
- The Design Review Board Process
- Snow Removal in the downtown center

ZBA Comments:

- Most thought that the actual process, once it was engaged, was generally fair, and moved along efficiently
- Some didn’t like the idea of having to give 2 months advance notice to get on a meeting agenda (one mentioned he missed the “deadline” by a day or two and was told simply that he could not be put on the agenda because he missed the deadline...no other explanation, like the agenda was full, or offering of help, like I’ll put you on as an option, but no guarantee that there will be time

enough to address your issue. The point was that there was no help or guidance offered which was perceived as cold, rather than welcoming of a new business.

- On the back end of the process, once he received a positive decision, and waited the requisite 21 day appeal period, one owner was told he would have to wait until 30 days after the decision was filed (which hadn't yet been done) before he could make his improvements. He felt that his approval was "lost in the stack"; his improvements were "seasonal" and every day that went by was a lost opportunity for his business.
- Some noted that there was confusion regarding parking requirements during their process.
- Most wished there was more guidance from the ZBA; if at first denied, there was little guidance offered as to how the business owners request could be modified to make it fit the zoning requirements.

Design Review Board Comments:

- Many felt that the DRB's process was too drawn out and subjective...no one wants to go through an extended process because the DRB doesn't like the colors of their logo, or that the letters on their sign should be smaller...paid a lot of money to design something distinctive and to help their business stand out, only to have it altered to satisfy some subjective opinion..."Town should understand that they are dealing with people who are trying to make the Town better by making Needham the home for their business, and not waste energy trying to "piss them off"
- One story I heard was that one woman applicant was reduced to tears in her meeting with the DRB.
- Many felt that the process in the DRB was more complicated than the ZBA...maybe because it seems to be more subjective, without well-defined expectations.

Snow Removal:

- A universal and very emotional issue for store-owners, especially in the center of Town.
- Snow piles along the street (especially on the east-of-the-center end of Great Plain) prevent shoppers from parking easily, and allow no access to mid-block stores. This difficulty pushes shoppers to the Malls and to other more convenient shopping and makes it difficult for businesses to survive the winter. Other towns, like Norwood, make it a point to remove all the built-up snow on the streets and edge of the sidewalks in the overnight hours the day after a storm to ensure that people can easily park and navigate among the stores in its downtown; local stores rely on local repeat business to create the shopping habits that keep them going...by effectively pushing shoppers away during the winter, you break their shopping routine, and shopping local becomes an after-thought. Needham should make a greater effort to help its businesses keep their clientele by making it convenient to shop in Needham, especially during the challenging weather of the winter months."

VII. Update on Needham Crossing Work

Given the lack of funds to independently support a website, members suggested Devra contact Greg about creating the landing page for Needham Crossing on the NNCC website. Devra did so and he has enthusiastically agreed; he will work directly with Tina Snyder of the Bulfinch Companies to create the page. We also need gateway signs; Devra spoke to Jon Feder about locations and look and he's reviewing it. [He came back with a design which Devra will discuss with both Mark Gluesing and Paul Good. Locations will probably have to be on private property.]

VIII. Update on Downtown Subcommittee (Streamlining Suggestions)

Members of the Downtown Subcommittee met with members of the Planning Board to discuss moving forward with additional streamlining efforts. Included are: insignificant modifications post construction, boiler plate provisions in decisions, moratorium on requiring parking studies for restaurants and other businesses in the Downtown, administrative transfer of restaurant special permits, and other proposals to simplify the process by making it more administrative. The meeting with the Planning Board was positive but the CEA ran out of time to go into detail as members had to leave a bit early.

IX. Update on Babson Application for Detailed Marketing Plan

Devra noted that she had her preliminary meeting with the Babson MCFE students on September 11th. Devra noted that, at her initial meeting, Babson students threw out some ideas to improve the downtown and one of them was on-going film festival at Town Hall. Devra suggested that, assuming we get sponsors, people, who make purchases of say \$25 at a locally-owned independent business and bring a stamped receipt, could attend for free and maybe our local candy store—Joel's—could sell candy at the showings. The Needham Merchants Association is working on the idea. Devra also met with the students at the Harvest Fair, where they had the opportunity to interview people and sample the souper bowl.

X. Update on Town Meeting

Two basically corrective By-Law proposals will be made. The first would allow personal fitness establishments in Industrial 1. The second will allow outdoor restaurant seating in districts other than in business districts. Essentially, the outdoor seating provisions would be expanded to apply to all restaurants. Although the CEA wanted to see outdoor seating extended to allow all food uses (ice cream shops, yogurt shops, bakeries, etc.) to put tables and chairs out, Devra explained that the Planning Board declined to do so at this time. The other zoning article relates to the Flood Plain Section of the By-Law.

XI. Other Business

There wasn't any discussed.

XII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:15 a.m.